

"Let me tell you, madam, that the first promoters of district nursing intended the nurses to be for the benefit of the sick poor, and that, therefore, there should be as little difficulty as possible in obtaining their services. I do not consider there is any analogy between the relations of business man and clerk and those of doctor and nurse in the district, and I appeal to all district nurses of any standing and to my fellow-superintendents to join me in refuting E. C.'s statements. Her experience of the matter must have been as limited as evidently unfortunate.

"District nurses must possess sound health and they must not be overworked—though there will be times of pressure in this, as in all other professions; they must be well-cared for, for the sake of the poor they serve if for no other reason, but more than all, they must have that love of what George MacDonald calls 'divine service' which will carry them over the difficulties incidental to their work. It will not be easy to get good district nurses as long as excellence in any kind of work is rare, for theirs is work of which the more we see of it the more we feel that we only want *the best* to do it. There is much to be said upon this subject, but this letter is already too long.

"After twenty-five years' work as a district nurse, I trust, madam, that I am not presumptuous in signing myself, "AMATRIX PAUPERUM."

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LETTERS

THE following interesting letter from a (to us) little-known corner of the earth is copied from the *Nurses' Journal*, the official organ of the R. B. N. A.:

"HOSPITAL ORTHODOXE DE ST. GEORGE,  
"BEYROUT, SYRIA.

". . . It was nearly eight years before I returned to Syria and entered St. George's Hospital, and started carrying out my plans. Doubtless the varied and wide experience I acquired during that time was necessary for me, and in the meantime the hospital had grown, and the committee, after many efforts and many failures in trying to organize the hospital, were glad to give me complete power. . . .

"When I took up the hospital I had a problem to face. The hospital had to be reformed, that was clear; but was I to do it slowly and cautiously, or was I to make a clean sweep of everything to its very foundation and make a fresh start? There had been an English matron before me who had failed in her attempts.

"I thought the matter over for a fortnight, and finally came to the conclusion that to change the moral tone of the place it was best to make a clean sweep of everything and everybody. It was no easy matter, for some of them had been fourteen years in the hospital. But there was a young nun who had been some eighteen months in the hospital. I kept her, and whether I have done wisely or not is yet to be seen, but my intention was a kind one.

"The hospital was in a terrible condition both morally and in reality; the building was beautiful, but dirt, disorder, and chaos reigned everywhere. Male attendants and wicked old Syrian Sairey Gamps had full possession, and the unfortunate place lacked all the elements of a hospital—it was pathetic and laughable to a degree. I worked away for two months before I ventured to bring in the new nurses, besides which the idea was so new to them, and the hospital had such a bad name, that girls and their mothers shrank from the idea

of their coming. Finally I found several, and started them on the same morning. I put them at once in uniform, consisting of blue cotton dresses and Sister Dora caps, much to their own and everybody's admiration. I formed a class, and the first morning I went around with them and taught them bedmaking and doing the lockers. This is all I ever expected them to do of ward work, with the exception of keeping their medicine-cupboards and dressing-wagon clean and washing the surgical implements themselves; otherwise the servants did everything. The nurses were not ladies, but above the servant class. I could never have got them to do the work we did in English hospitals; but in any case, after a short probation, it would never be my principle to mix ward work and nursing together, because I consider that the one is done to the detriment of the other.

"But to go back to the training of my nurses, the only course open to me under the circumstances was to form a class and go about with them from bed to bed, doing everything with them, and it is perfectly marvellous how quickly they grasped the situation. In a few days I portioned out to them each their wards, and every morning they came to me for orders and every night for reports, after which I gave them a lecture on their cases, or lessons in bandaging, temperature taking, charting, etc., and later on the doctors gave them more advanced lectures.

"The nun, whom I at first made head nurse, I put on night duty, as she was older and more experienced, and I was better able to leave her in charge of the hospital at night. Here I may perhaps give my opinion and experience with reference to nuns as nurses, as it has been a much-discussed subject. A nurse is taught thoroughness, loyalty, and pride in her work. A nun does her work because she expects Heaven to reward her for it, therefore she is best with the dying and with chronic cases. She is patient, loving, and devoted, but she is not fit for the rush of acute cases, nor for up-to-date professional nursing. She must fast, attend many offices, and have retreats. Fasting may be the duty of a nun, but acute medical and surgical cases do not thrive where the nurse is faint for want of food, nor are nuns able to fast and attend operations. And this became my difficulty about my nun. As soon as I found out that my nurses were fasting, and noticed their white faces and the giddy, dazed way they went about their work, I put a stop to it by forbidding them ever to enter the wards without breakfast, or to refrain from eating meat except the first and last week of each fast, but this is what I was not able to do with the nun. Greek fasts are long, numerous, and severe to a degree; in some they may not even touch milk or eggs, vegetables, snails, and olives and fruit being all they are allowed. Their feasts and saints' days are also numerous. Consequently my nun was either on her knees in her room in front of a lighted image, or fasting, or at church, and I could never depend upon her for her work. She certainly was excellent with the dying and with the most trying patients, or with infectious cases, even the most loathsome, such as leprosy. She also had a great *prestige* with the patients, and prayed with them, and talked to them, and comforted them. On night duty she did best.

"As to the training of Syrian nurses, I think, on the whole, it may be considered a great success. Some of the small missionary hospitals in Palestine and Syria have had the training of isolated cases, and from what I hear they have proved satisfactory. Of course, none have had the position nor the systematic training the nurses at St. George's Hospital are having. I have put them on their mettle by telling them that they are in their own hospital, sup-

ported by native contributions, the committee and doctors being their own countrymen.

"They are bright, clever, and amiable in their dispositions, but the East consists of disorder and chaos; they are born in it, and cannot understand being punctual and methodical, and consequently want constantly being looked after. They are excellent at surgical work, love bandaging and dressing wounds, and take the keenest interest in their progress. At operations (with the exception of one nurse) they are astonishing; the quickness and deftness with which they learned how to hand the right instruments to the doctors and get everything ready for operations have surprised me.

"The operating-theatre has been fitted up with the latest and most costly sterilizers, table, and glass cases from Paris, and is their pride, for whichever one of them I have put in charge of the theatre has kept it spotless. The doctors used to have their colleagues to help them at their operations, but now they prefer the nurses' help. The surgeons are natives, of course, and since the new *régime* have been able to venture on the major and up-to-date operations. Of course, the nurses are still young and still lack experience, but after a year and eight months I have been able to leave the hospital for the whole summer in charge of an English lady who is not trained, and depend on the nurses for their work, for there is not an order which a doctor can give which they cannot execute. This goes to prove that when special and systematic attention is given to the training of women who have come to the years of discretion, and are fairly educated, the result can but be satisfactory.

"In taking up this hospital my work has not only been the training of Syrian girls as nurses, but I have been able to give the native doctors a helping hand, where, in their own hospital and no longer under European supervision, they have been able to feel their feet and progress in their work. As doctors and surgeons they are very clever, and both in England and in France have frequently passed their examinations with high honors, but as organizers or managers of the hospital they failed utterly. Such things as temperature charts, or cards for prescriptions and dietary, were unknown, and their habits and customs towards the patients were very funny. Syrians are all very clever and sharp, but exactly like big children, and women never take any part in practical affairs. In the East I found myself regarded as a phenomenon.

"I have tried to teach them that as long as they treat their women in the way they do they will never advance or get more than superficially civilized. Until I entered the hospital no ladies ever put their feet in the building, but now there is a ladies' committee, which has been providing the linen for the hospital and most of the furniture (for it was a bare, comfortless place). The rich Syrian ladies live in marble palaces, with the richest and gaudiest of French furniture. They have their dresses from Paris, and wear diamonds and jewels such as never are seen in England except at Court balls. They have grand balls and dinners and entertain European royalties, but with the exception of one of them, who had worked up a girls' school, not one of them had taken up any good works, and they spent their days and nights in playing cards and gambling. Then they took up this hospital, and it has now become their joy and their toy.

"E. W."

